In our work to foster just communities, we are encouraged by the commitment of the Religious of the Sacred Heart:

Religious of the Sacred Heart continue our work humbly to acknowledge our history with enslavement, to build relationships with the descendants of the enslaved persons, to work with the descendants towards racial equity, and to end systemic racism in our institutional structures.

While the sad reality of the Society’s enslaving people in North America has not been hidden, neither has this history been generally known. We believe that as we live in the present within Sacred Heart Learning Communities, we need to learn from the past in order to construct a future characterized by justice. We specifically wish to examine the history of the enslaved persons and Religious of the Sacred Heart to learn the truth of this past and to respond to the call of the Goals and Criteria to be persons and communities working to help transform ongoing racist attitudes and behaviors within ourselves and within our communities.

We invite you to join us in claiming our past as we move forward together, “Learning from the Past - Living in the Present - Preparing for the Future.”

The units:
- Unit I: Claiming the Truth of Our History
- Unit II: A Moment of Reckoning
- Unit III: Searching for the Truth as Sacred Heart Learning Communities
- Unit IV: Contrition is an Essential Step Towards Reconciliation

Unit I – Claiming the Truth of Our History

This unit begins with the mandate of Society of the Sacred Heart’s Truth and Reconciliation Committee which was to continue our work humbly to acknowledge our history with enslavement, to build relationships with the descendants of the enslaved persons, to work with the descendants towards racial equity, and to end systemic racism in our institutional structures. The unit reviews the methodology used to identify the enslaved persons and to discover names of many of the descendants. The unit concludes outlining the work of descendants and RSCJ towards reconciliation.

Essential Questions:
- What was the Province’s Truth and Reconciliation Committee? Why is this committee’s work important?
Why is it important for Schools of the Sacred Heart to know the commitment of the RSCJ to acknowledge our history with enslavement, to build relationships with the descendants of the enslaved persons, and to work with the descendants towards racial equity and the end to systemic racism in our institutional structures?

What are the names and contributions of the enslaved persons whose forced labor contributed to the foundation of Sacred Heart education in North America?

How do we know who the descendants are?

Lesson I, Our Call to Act for Justice, outlines the mandate for the Society’s Truth and Reconciliation Committee. We explore the contradiction of the Society’s mission and our history of enslaving persons. It introduces the Society’s history of enslaving persons and calls us to help transform ongoing racist attitudes and behaviors.

Lesson 2, We Speak Your Names, identifies the enslaved persons whose forced labor helped to make possible Sacred Heart education in North America. We offer insights into their stories as we know it today.

Lesson 3, The Process of Discovery, explores how we know the names of the enslaved persons whose forced labor helped to make possible Sacred Heart education in North America and describes the research methodology used to locate descendants.

Lesson 4, The Work of Reconciliation Continues, shares the ongoing work with descendants and RSCJ towards racial reconciliation.

Unit II - A Moment of Reckoning

This unit addresses the obvious question regarding the complicity of the Church in the historic sin of enslaving people. How could Church leaders, including members of religious congregations such as the Society of the Sacred Heart, justify the practice of enslaving human beings?

Essential Questions:

What were the economic factors influencing the establishment of enslavement in colonial Maryland, Louisiana, Missouri and Canada?

What role did the Church play in supporting the enslavement of persons?

What was the influence of the Church on the first RSCJ as they arrived in 1818?

Lesson 1, The Historic Context, outlines the context of enslaved persons in North America, specifically in colonial Maryland, Louisiana and Missouri. There is also an overview of colonial Canada.

Lesson 2, Catholic Church: Colonial Maryland, Louisiana, & Missouri, offers an overview of the role the Catholic Church played in supporting the institution of enslaving human persons. This brief overview helps us comprehend the context in which the RSCJ arrived in 1818.
Lesson 3, Early Years of RSCJ & the First Schools in North America, introduces the RSCJ first in North America and explores the context in which Sacred Heart education began with the founding of the first Sacred Heart schools.

Unit III - Searching for the Truth as Sacred Heart Learning Communities

This Unit reminds us of our responsibility as Sacred Heart Communities, formed in the attitudes of Christ’s Heart, to be integral people who act with integrity and a sense of personal agency. The lesson guides us through the Seven Principles of Catholic Social Teaching and reminds us of the essential role the five steps sometimes called the Sacred Heart way - Pause, Reflect, Discuss, Discern and Act. These principles and this way of living are essential if we are to foster justice.

Essential Questions:
- Why are we responsible to work for justice?
- What inspires us as students and educators of the Sacred Heart to fight racism and to build just communities?
- What are the essential elements of an education to responsibility and compassion?
- How do we understand discernment, critical consciousness, and personal agency?
- How do the principles of Catholic Social Teaching help us to identify and challenge systemic racism and other forms of injustice?

Lesson 1, Communities of Christ’s Heart, reminds us as students and educators of the Sacred Heart of our call to act as Jesus would by recognizing the importance of recognizing the inherent dignity of all.

Lesson 2, An Education to Responsibility and Compassion, reminds us of our responsibility as Sacred Heart Learning Communities to be integral people who act with integrity, operate with a sense of personal agency, and practice discernment.

Lesson 3, The Call of Catholic Social Teaching, (CST) explores why a change of heart is necessary if we are to understand the call to justice that these principles demand.

Lesson 4, The Principles of Catholic Social Teaching, explores the seven principles of modern Catholic Social Teaching and the call of CST today to all of us to resist systemic racism in all its forms.

Unit IV - Contrition is an Essential Step towards Reconciliation

Unit IV recognizes that our schools would not be here today without the forced labor of the enslaved people who played a vital role in the early years of Sacred Heart education in North America. We are called to genuine contrition and sorrow in the face of this truth – the same truth that calls us to uncover and address our complicity in the racist structures and systems that continue today in the United States and Canada as well as around the world.
Essential Questions:
- What does it mean to acknowledge and honor the enslaved persons while expressing genuine contrition and sorrow for the choices made in the past?
- How does working to comprehend our tendency to “other” people help us comprehend our involvement in racism?
- How does acknowledging the harm caused by the RSCJ’s history of enslaving persons contribute to healing and racial reconciliation?
- How can using the examen on our involvement in social sin help us work for justice?

Lesson 1, We Speak your Names, We Remember and our Hearts are full of Sorrow, focuses on the Society’s commitment to recover the story of enslavement in our early days in North America and the statement of sorrow and contrition offered by Sr. Sheila Hammond, Provincial of the Society of the Sacred Heart, USC Province at the Ceremony of Remembrance and Reconciliation at Grand Coteau in September 2018.

Lesson 2, Sin - Violation of Relationship, explores the difference between personal and social sin and the essential attitudes of heart necessary for reconciliation.

Lesson 3, Examining Our Heart, explores the use of the examen as an essential practice for all who wish to foster just communities. We cannot fight racism if we do not recognize our own tendency to commit the sin of “othering.”

Lesson 4, The Social Sin of Racism Manifested in Structures, explores how the social sin of racism is perpetuated as it becomes embedded in our consciousness and in the systems and structures that form the institutions and society in which we live our lives.

Lesson 5, An Examen on Social Sin, provides a means of examining a variety of personal, communal and justice issues using Gregory Baum’s Four Levels of Social Sin and the idea of the examen.

The Conference wants to thank the Network Schools who piloted some of the units and the many individuals around the Network who both proofread and critiqued our work, offering many excellent suggestions that are incorporated into these units.

We hope to continue to get your feedback as you use these materials with your students, faculty, and the wider Sacred Heart Community.

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